DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 197 UD 029 240

AUTHOR Clark, Catherine P.
TITLE Compensatory Education in Texas.
INSTITUTION Texas Center for Educational Research, Austin.
PUB DATE Jan 93
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Compensatory Education; *Cost Effectiveness; Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Eligibility; Evaluation Methods; Evaluation Problems; Nontraditional Education; *Parent Education; Parent Participation; Pregnancy; Program Evaluation; *Program Implementation; *School Districts; *State Programs; State Surveys; Summer Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

Compensatory education describes the special programs and services provided to students who are not succeeding in school and who do not qualify for special education. Educators define these students as "at risk"--at risk of school failure and a difficult transition to productive adult life. A recent study of compensatory education by the Texas Center for Educational Research found Texas school districts in various stages of implementing new compensatory programs. This report summarizes the recent review, and considers some of its recommendations. Compensatory education was examined in 22 school districts in 1992. School districts have begun to diversify compensatory education, and these programs were divided into the following nine categories: (1) alternative schools; (2) pregnancy and parenting programs; (3) whole school programs; (4) one-to-one programs (5) classroom programs; (6) small group programs; (7) summer school; (8) family involvement programs; and (9) group counseling and support programs. The effectiveness of these programs is difficult to determine because of the widespread absence of evaluation efforts tied to program objectives. Eligibility criteria are broad and sometimes inclusive of all students in a district. Costs were calculated for each of the nine categories. Alternative schools are the most costly; and summer school, family involvement, and counseling are the least expensive. Recommendations center on the need to have plans that are more explicit, with the roles of districts and the state clearly defined. Two tables summarize study findings. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED358197

Texas Center for Educational Research
P.O. Box 2947
Austin, Texas 78768-2947
512-467-0222 or 800-580-8237

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
C. P. Clark
Texas Center for Ed. Research
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Compensatory Education in Texas

Catherine P. Clark, Ph.D.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

January 1993

Copyright © 1993 by the Texas Center for Educational Research. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the Texas Center for Educational Research.

Texas Center for Educational Research
P.O. Box 2947
Austin, Texas 78768-2947
512-467-0222 or 800-580-8237

Compensatory Education in Texas

Catherine P. Clark, Ph.D.

January 1993

Compensatory Education in Texas*

Catherine Clark
Texas Center for Educational Research
Austin, Texas

January 1993

Compensatory education describes the special programs and services provided to students who are not succeeding in school and who do not qualify for special education. Educators define these students as "at risk"—at risk of school failure and a difficult transition to productive adult life. For many years the approach to serving these students has been to repeat their exposure to learning materials or to schedule them into classes with a slower-paced and less-challenging curriculum. This approach is changing in large part because state and local assessment systems show that students are not making sufficient progress in low-level courses to prepare them for high school graduation, jobs, or postsecondary education. Of particular concern is the disappointing performance of high school students on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Funding for compensatory education derives from federal Chapter 1 funds, foundation program compensatory education allocations, and local enrichment revenue. Chapter 1, targeted to low-income students, serves one of every nine students, on average. Texas compensatory education allotments (a combination of state aid and local support) provide $710 million annually, or about $429 per identified student. Allocations to school districts are based on a proxy of student need measured by qualification for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program. About 44 percent of Texas students are eligible for the lunch program, and the proportion is expected to exceed 50 percent within a few years. District compensatory education allotments are calculated using this eligibility criteria. Actual program enrollment at the school level does not drive the funding allocation.

The model for programs for at-risk students is moving to a more flexible and holistic approach. Some programs aim to accelerate the achievement of low-performing students. New services have been added to programs to assist students with social and emotional problems which may be impeding academic progress. Other programs offer the regular curriculum in new settings or with new approaches.

---

*Significant portions of this paper appear in the *Journal of Texas Public Education*, Vol. 1, 1992, pp. 22-28.

A recent study of compensatory education by the Texas Center for Educational Research (TCER) found school districts in various stages of implementing new compensatory programs. Some districts have numerous offerings designed to improve academic performance and reduce dropout rates, and other districts have just begun to consider new programs for low-achieving students. This report summarizes this recent study of compensatory education and reviews some of the recommendations from that study.

TCER Compensatory Education Study

The Texas Center for Educational Research conducted a study of compensatory education in 22 school districts in 1992. One of the objectives of the study was to determine the eligibility criteria and the cost for different types of compensatory education by gathering information on current programs and services. Field study teams requested program information and visited programs identified by research to be effective. Also included for site visits were programs that, in the opinion of district administrators, were outstanding for their effectiveness.

Researchers examined compensatory education plans and talked with program administrators and principals to determine how program eligibility criteria are derived for a variety of compensatory programs. Researchers then determined the actual costs of the programs by collecting budget data and discussing program elements and expenditures with campus and district staff.

To simplify the analysis, the programs were organized into nine categories: alternative schools, pregnancy and parenting programs, whole school programs, one-to-one programs, classroom programs, small group programs, summer school, family involvement programs, and group counseling and support programs. Researchers compiled the per pupil cost of each program within each category, with the median per pupil cost for each of the nine categories forming the basis for the analysis and comparisons.

Findings

School districts have begun to diversify compensatory education, and Texas districts now offer a wide variety of programs to students at all grade levels. Compensatory education programs that districts identify as most effective tend to be comprehensive with instructional components, counseling and social services, community and volunteer support, regular family contact, staff development, and computers. Many compensatory education programs operate without an explicit written plan or budget, and most districts have not made provision for ongoing program evaluation tied to explicit program objectives. The first order of business in school districts seems to be to get the program in place and running smoothly, not to manage the mechanics of planning and budgeting.

Eligibility criteria for admission into compensatory education programs is broad and, in some schools, inclusive of all students. Program eligibility is not tied specifically to student qualification for the free and reduced-price lunch program. Thus, the characteristic that drives state compensatory education funds to school districts and the measures of need within the school are not the same, leading to the potential mismatch of funding and unclear expectations of compensatory education in general.

Effective Compensatory Education. Research literature offers relatively little guidance to education programs that have been proven effective. Promising programs that appear in catalogs are usually included without regard to the rigor of evaluation leading to the designation of "effective." Compensatory education effectiveness is, in fact, difficult to determine because of the widespread absence of evaluation efforts tied to program objectives.

Research-based effective compensatory education practices include some types of tutoring, appropriate use of computers, direct instruction, sustained family involvement, explicit and ongoing coordination with the regular program, and immediate intervention for students who experience difficulty in school. These practices cannot stand alone as programs, but they should be considered for inclusion in a comprehensive compensatory education program. Many experts believe that the most effective point of intervention is at the early grades, but school districts in Texas endeavor to serve all students who are in need of special services rather than explicitly focusing on the early grades and prekindergarten.

Compensatory Education Costs. Table I shows the median per-participant cost for programs within each of the nine categories. Alternative schools are the most costly compensatory education interventions. These programs typically replace the regular program for secondary students who have multiple indicators of risk and require a setting different from the traditional school in order to succeed. Programs for pregnant and parenting students are almost as costly as alternative schools. Per-participant costs vary widely among programs according to the level of student use of district-provided child care and supplemental transportation. In most cases, instructional enhancement for pregnant and parenting students can be handled within the home school in regular and vocational education classes. Pregnant and parenting students in large urban districts are more likely to be affected by multiple risk factors and in need of multiple services. In most cases, these additional risk factors are not directly associated with the students' status as parents but, rather, are a result of personal and community factors.

Table I
Compensatory Education Program Costs

	Number of Programs in Sample	Number of Students in Sample		Median Cost per Participant (Incremental Cost)	
		Current	Maximum	Current	Maximum
Alternative School*	10	1,179	1,563	$3,490	$3,047
Classroom Programs	19	1,566	1,601	861	860
Small Groups	9	1,529	1,604	735	588
One-to-one Programs	8	2,864	2,937	227	217
Summer School	5	57,279	57,439	131	131
Whole School Programs	8	5,178	5,178	309	309
Group Counseling and Support	3	2,481	2,481	375	375
Family Involvement	3	185	205	118	118
Teen Pregnancy and Parenting	7	647	728	2,723	2,267

* Alternative school costs are replacement costs.

Summer school, counseling, and family involvement programs have the lowest per-participant costs. These programs supplement both the regular and compensatory education instructional programs and cannot, by themselves, meet the needs of most compensatory education students. Summer school, as currently offered, is an abbreviated program focusing on test preparation and remedial core courses. For these reasons, reported summer school costs per-participant are low and should not be assumed to be equivalent to the cost of extending the regular school year for several weeks.

Whole school programs have a per-participant cost of about $300 per student, lower than classroom programs, small group programs, and one-to-one programs. This should be of particular interest to educators and policymakers because whole school programs tend to be comprehensive in scope, and include elements believed to be effective for all students (e.g., family involvement, heterogeneous grouping, emphasis on strengths rather than deficits, and a shared belief within the school community that all students can learn).

Table II
Compensatory Education Program Indexes

	Numbers of Programs in Sample	Numbers of Students in Sample		Median Index for Compensatory Education Programs by Type	
		Current	Maximum	Current	Maximum
Alternative School*	10	1,179	1,563	1.55	1.16
Classroom Programs	19	1,566	1,601	.40	.40
Small Groups	9	1,529	1,604	.37	.28
One-to-one Programs	8	2,864	2,937	.10	.10
Summer School	5	57,279	57,439	.06	.06
Whole School Programs	8	5,178	5,178	.13	.13
Group Counseling and Support	3	2,481	2,481	.16	.16
Family Involvement	3	185	205	.06	.06
Teen Pregnancy and Parenting	7	647	728	1.32	.90

*Alternative school costs are replacement costs.

A ratio or index computed by dividing the per-participant cost of each compensatory program by the average instructional operating expenditure for the district describes the relationship between the incremental instructional cost of compensatory education and the overall average instructional cost. The higher cost programs also have higher index numbers. Table II shows the median index number for programs within each of the nine categories.

Discussion

Program planning. School districts are instructed to prepare compensatory education plans, but these plans tend to serve the function of catalogs. Some districts offer extensive descriptions of programs that include objectives and total expenditures broken down by source of funding. Other plans identify the program, the grade level, and the school or schools at which it is offered. While these plans are helpful descriptive instruments, they do not document a planning process or provide a basis whereby programs can be evaluated. Part of the difficulty in compensatory education

program evaluation is the general nature of typical program objectives. A frequently stated program objective is to reduce the dropout rate. Another is to improve the participants' reading achievement. These objectives are not clear enough to guide evaluators who want to assess program effectiveness. For example, it is critical to know how much of a change in the dropout rate (or reading comprehension) is expected. It is also important to compare the current and expected performance level of students in the regular education program with students in the compensatory education program. It would also be helpful to know how programs are intended to affect students with different eligibility criteria.

Eligibility. Eligibility for compensatory education programs is based on a flexible set of characteristics, usually set at the campus level. In practice, programs extend to a wide range of the student population. The state does not constrain districts from making program placement decisions. While this policy encourages local control, it does leave open the question of how well resources are targeted to students. Since the district funding level (determined by free and reduced price lunch participation) is not tied to program enrollments or outcomes, the issue of fiscal accountability is unresolved. Districts can exercise a great deal of freedom in program development and delivery, but program costs and student outcomes are difficult to track.

Costs. Compensatory education comprises a wide range of programs and costs across the state. In order to determine the costs attributable to the compensatory part of the educational program, only the incremental direct costs were reported for each program category, except for alternative schools.

Alternative schools had the highest costs due to the small class size, use of computers, and additional support staff associated with operating a separate program. Districts that operate an alternative school facility incur additional capital costs not included in this study. Pregnancy and parenting programs were also relatively costly, primarily due to the cost of child care, supplemental transportation, and health and nutrition services.

Among the lower-cost programs were whole school programs, summer school, and one-to-one programs. It is interesting to note that the per student cost of whole school programs is relatively low compared with narrower efforts like small group programs or counseling. In recent years, elementary whole school approaches such as Accelerated Schools and Success for All have received widespread attention for their effectiveness because (1) they treat the whole school population, (2) they are outcome based and aim to assure grade-level reading proficiency when the student leaves elementary school, (3) they are integrated, thus reducing isolation and tracking, (4) they rely on strong staff development, (5) they incorporate involvement for all students' families, and (6) they were developed specifically for use in schools serving

large proportions of disadvantaged and low-achieving students. These programs may prove to be cost-effective alternatives to traditional remedial programs.

Summer school has low per-participant costs for several reasons: (1) teachers are on a daily or hourly stipend instead of regular salary; (2) the program uses textbooks and materials provided for the regular program; (3) activities like band, physical education, and laboratory science (all high-cost courses) are not usually part of the summer school program; (4) districts do not provide transportation, counseling, and other support services, except as mandated by law; and (5) summer school operates for a half day and attendance is not required. In practice, most summer school programs are remedial classes that are not intended to replace the regular program. The exception to this approach is the intersession program offered by schools organized on a year-round calendar.

It is difficult to estimate one typical cost for compensatory education in Texas. First, the goals of programs differ, and the goals affect instructional and support strategies. For example, alternative schools replace rather than supplement the regular instructional program. These programs have ambitious goals of dropout recovery, improved social behavior, and academic improvement. The instructional services directed to pregnant and parenting students are relatively low cost, but the supplemental transportation, child care, and health and nutritional counseling services make the cost of the program quite high. One-to-one programs aim to improve student achievement on a tutorial basis. Each of these programs has different goals and approaches, and, for that reason, program costs vary among districts.

A second reason why a single compensatory education cost is hard to obtain is the difficulty of gauging the intensity of instruction. Comparisons among and within programs become difficult. For example, a counseling program may provide intensive services to a few students and general services to a large group. The typical cost measured by a median or an average does not really capture the per-student cost of the program.

Third, school districts often do not maintain program budgets for compensatory education programs. One reason for this is that a program often resides at one or two campuses, not the entire district. The accounting office will lump the program costs with all other compensatory costs, and then report costs according to function. Campus principals' budgets may only include the supplemental or discretionary expenditure items related to the program. In some districts, compensatory education funds, federal Chapter 1 funds, and local dollars support several complementary programs. In short, most districts record compensatory education revenue and expenditure according to state accounting requirements, but the finance office does not tie dollars to individual programs or classes. The program people, on the other hand, may have only a partial idea of what costs make up the program.

Recommendations

A better model for compensatory education would require explicit planning with program goals, descriptions, expected student contact hours in different settings, and a program budget. Explicit eligibility standards would increase the accountability of the district (and the campus) and keep compensatory education courses from becoming repositories for students with poorly-diagnosed problems. The drawback to explicit eligibility standards is that they reduce educators' flexibility to serve students. However, since standards would be set locally, nothing prohibits the districts from revising and amending the plan as needed to reflect changing service needs. The goal should be to have a plan that is explicit about who is served, what program elements are in place, and what the elements cost.

Based on a review of the research in compensatory education, adoption of the following recommendations is likely to improve the delivery and financing of programs for at-risk students. These recommendations are organized according to whether they are appropriate for school districts or the state to implement.

School Districts. A strong compensatory education plan is an important step in improving services for at-risk students. The plan should not only describe the programs offered at different campuses, but articulate the ways in which they complement each other. In particular, programs at the elementary level should have a logical connection to both the regular and the compensatory education program at the middle school. Similarly, middle school programs should have a connection to regular and compensatory education programs and services at the high school. The plan should offer clear, measurable objectives and exit criteria. For too long educators have been content to rely on the impressions of teachers, principals, and students about whether a program is working without directly examining student achievement and comparing it to achievement of similar students not served by the program.

Districts should consider research-based whole school programs as an intervention at the elementary level. Whole school programs offer a holistic approach for students at the same time that they avoid tracking and labelling. They unite the whole campus in an effort to serve children and they rely for their success on a variety of models for good instruction. Districts should also review compensatory education program eligibility criteria to make sure that students with the greatest need receive appropriate services. A review of compensatory education plans reveals very broad eligibility categories for currently offered programs. While this assists districts in providing equal educational opportunities, it could dilute the resources available to compensatory education. Program eligibility should help the district target funds effectively.

The state. The state should provide leadership by encouraging school districts to develop compensatory education plans that have program goals, clear eligibility

guidelines, measurable objectives, and a system for evaluation and assessment. Texas has permitted districts to experiment with innovative programs and delivery systems for students at risk. These appear, from the field study, to have been successful in stimulating new efforts, both in districts that received grant awards and in districts that applied for awards but were not successful. Educators involved in innovative programs have had opportunities, through conferences and reports disseminated by the Texas Education Agency, to share their programs with other educators. The amount of intrastate stimulation of reform has increased as a result of formal dissemination efforts and informal networking. Texas should continue to fund pilot and innovative programs.

Policymakers should consider a funding arrangement that recognizes the cost differences among compensatory education programs. More costly alternative schools could be supported through separate funding. The high-cost services for pregnancy and parenting programs could be funded on a cost reimbursement plan, leaving the instructional program to be funded in the same manner other compensatory instructional programs are funded. If summer school is to be an important instructional component for low-achieving students, the program should be restructured and explicit outcome criteria should be developed at the district level. Effective summer school will cost more than the current arrangement but may be more effective.

Lastly, the state should investigate the costs to districts that serve high percentages of compensatory and at-risk students. Districts heavily impacted by at-risk populations may need additional support to serve all students adequately.

References

Clark, Catherine and Richard Powell, (1992). *Study on Funding Compensatory Education Programs in Texas.* Austin, TX: Texas Center for Educational Research.

Levin, Henry M. (October 1987). "Accelerated Schools for Disadvantaged Students." *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 44, No. 2: 19-21.

Slavin, Robert E. and Nancy A. Madden (1991). "Modifying Chapter 1 Program Improvement Guidelines to Reward Appropriate Practices." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Vol. 13: 369-379.*